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ABSTRACT

Hiring the faculty best suited to meet the changing demands of the 1990s is one of the most important tasks facing the administrative and faculty leadership at community colleges. In an effort to fill a significant number of faculty positions at Montgomery College (MC), a new college in Texas, the college has purposefully defined the challenges it faces, the types of students expected to be served, and the kind of faculty needed to effectively serve these students. The students that MC expects to serve can be viewed along a spectrum of preparation. Underprepared students typically make up around half of a community college's student population, and these students require flexibility in instructional methods to ensure that all students acquire college-level skills. MC also expects considerable numbers of college-ready students who will need advanced data management, problem-solving, and communication skills to compete in the modern work force, as well as well-prepared students and adult learners, requiring a curriculum that allows them to excel and achieve at very high levels. Qualifications that faculty will need to serve these students include strong preparation reflecting continuous updating, ability to communicate expected outcomes to students and encourage student evaluation of instruction, commitment to student retention, awareness of alternative methods of instruction and current technology, and being comfortable with non-traditional educational settings. (BCY)

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Like the 1960s, the 1990s will be a watershed decade for community colleges. Not only have they emerged in this decade as mature institutions of which much is expected, but a convergence of demographic, technological, and economic changes virtually ensure that the character of community colleges for the foreseeable future will be determined during the 1990s.

Most significantly, community colleges throughout the United States will hire their next generation of faculty, both to replace fully half of their current faculty, many of whom were hired during their colleges' founding years in the 1960s, and to accommodate continued enrollment growth and program expansion. Arguably, hiring the faculty best suited to meet the changing demands of the 1990s is the single most important task currently facing the administrative and faculty leadership of American community colleges.

Intentionality and Vision in Hiring

Montgomery College is a new community college established to serve the growing needs of the North Harris and Montgomery County area of suburban Houston. Although Montgomery College is seeking to fill a significant number of faculty positions in its initial years, rather than to replace retiring members of its current faculty—the situation in which the majority of community colleges find themselves today—the task of hiring the best faculty to meet the needs of community college students is essentially the same in either situation.

To ensure its success in this critical task, Montgomery College has purposefully defined the challenges it faces, the kinds of students that it expects to serve, and the kind of faculty it will need to meet the needs of these students. Such intentionality is critical to hiring the right next generation of faculty. Colleges facing hiring decisions on a significant scale must begin the process by carefully envisioning the kind of college they hope to staff.

For example, Montgomery College intends to create an institution whose purpose is to help citizens meet the challenges of a rapidly changing world. This will require faculty and staff who are not afraid of—indeed, who are comfortable with—the uncertainty and stress that change engenders. Montgomery College intends to prepare students for, in the words of President Clinton, "a world in which communication and commerce are global; investment is mobile; technology is almost magical; and ambition for a better life is universal." The college will need faculty who excel in such a world.

With this environment in mind, the strategy of Montgomery College is to do more than provide a seat in a classroom. Rather, all students will be nurtured, supported, and challenged, not necessarily using the 50-minute, three-meetings-per-week, semester-based model upon which current instructional delivery is premised. The college will seek faculty who share this understanding and are commited to developing teaching and learning models suited to demands placed upon students by a rapidly changing world.

Spectrum of Student Preparation and Needs

The types of students Montgomery College expects to serve can be viewed along a spectrum of preparation.

Underprepared Students. Fully half of the students who come to the community college are not ready for college-level work in terms of basic skills—math, communication, and reading. Yet, community colleges have an implicit commitment to their communities to help these students achieve college-level academic skills. The still-rising high school dropout rates and staggering backlog of adults who need basic skills development will define a major component of the community college mission for the indefinite future.

To fulfill this commitment, colleges cannot be limited by instructional strategies that are doctrinaire about the number of hours per week or number of weeks per semester students need to develop skills. Rather, the focus must be on the outcome of ensuring that every student will acquire necessary college-level skills using a wide variety of instructional methods. These methods should support student learning at a challenging pace while recognizing individual differences and giving each student appropriate levels of control over the learning process. Existing practices that constrain either the pace of individual learning or the availability of supplemental learning support to students must be revised.

Inherent in this commitment is a much broader application of the wide variety of learning support and learning resources. Both high-tech and high-touch will be required. Students cannot be expected to achieve all of their remediation and developmental goals simply by being provided access to technology. At the same time, available learning technology in the developmental area is now very strong in its pedagogy, is geared toward adult learners, and has incorporated the ever-increasing power of microcomputers to expand ways in which students exercise control over well-managed learning experiences. Faculty who do not use these resources to supplement or complement their direct instruction and

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student support will need to demonstrate alternative means of achieving equal or better learning outcomes and student retention.

College-Ready Students. Further along on the preparation and ability spectrum are the great number of students who are prepared for college-level coursework. For these students it is important to recognize the increasing challenges of the world they face away from Montgomery College. Despite the fact that the college credit hour and semester are essentially the same today as they were in the nineteenth century, the hard reality is that as businesses compete globally, the preparation and skills necessary to maintain employment are changing and increasing dramatically. Information and data management skills, problem solving, communications, and collaboration skills are required for successful employment. Montgomery College must find ways to ensure that these skills are incorporated in the curricula, taught, reinforced, and enhanced so that course and program completers have achieved a broad range of cognitive and noncognitive skills.

In addition, there is more for students to learn. Employees at every level of a modern organization are expected to understand far more of the underlying processes and practices of their business. They are expected to make suggestions as to how such processes and practices can be improved and streamlined. The outcomes of our courses and programs must reflect this necessary increase in preparation.

Faculty will need to demonstrate how such demands can be addressed both within and beyond the classroom experience. Instructional technology will invariably be used to support this kind of learning.

Well-Prepared Students and Adults. Finally, on the other end of the preparation spectrum are students who are very well prepared for college work. This includes recent high school graduates who are eligible to attend highly selective colleges and universities, as well as adults with significant educational attainments or life experiences that have prepared them well to succeed in college programs. Because Montgomery College insists on being a "first choice" option for well-prepared students, the college must ensure that the nature of its curriculum and instructional delivery models allows such students to excel and achieve at very high levels. For these students, opportunities beyond the three 50-minute class periods per week are absolutely mandatory for achieving the kinds of academic success that are implied by competitive choice.

Characteristics of Faculty

From the vantage point of the students to be served, the characteristics of the faculty Montgomery College must identify, recruit, and hire become clear. These include faculty who routinely go beyond existing commitments and current models to challenge students and nurture them in the pursuit of the competencies they require to succeed in a complex and demanding world. Specifically, the college seeks faculty:

- who possess appropriate and strong preparation—academic and/or experiential—in their teaching field, which reflects continuous updating throughout the faculty member's career;
- who, in every course they teach, share with students the learning outcomes expected of them as part of a thorough and comprehensive syllabus that provides assurance and guidance to students;
- who can document a commitment to student retention and success—faculty who get *more* students over the academic hurdles, rather than simply getting *some* students higher in clearing the hurdles, and work in partnership with student development professionals;
- who demonstrate the use of alternate methods of organizing instruction in order to recognize different learning needs among students;
- who have developed practices that encourage student evaluation of instruction and use the results for their own continuous improvement;
- who have a consistent record of curriculum development, including course renewal, new course development, and revised instructional delivery throughout their careers;
- who are literate in information technology and recognize the fundamental changes that are emerging with expanded use of computers and increased focus on skills and outcomes;
- who are willing to challenge comfortable and established patterns of instruction and curriculum that reflect convenience of the organization rather than needs of the learners;
- who have a track record in employing supplemental learning materials, support staff, and other learning resources found in laboratory and learning center environments;
- who can demonstrate collaboration with other teaching faculty at the secondary school level and at the university level as appropriate;
- who are comfortable teaching in nontraditional educational settings in support of business and industry training, retraining, and staff development needs;
- who are active, contributing members of the communities in which they live; and
- who are willing to take a risk to be part of the establishment of a new enterprise worthy of the responsive heritage of the American community college movement.

Using these criteria, Montgomery College hopes to bring together many professionals with diverse, complementary backgrounds, and to build a faculty and staff who can serve as mentors, role models, advisors, and supporters of its students. Everyone can think of those few faculty who changed his or her life—the kind of faculty who routinely get students to learn and do more than they themselves ever thought possible. Montgomery College welcomes the challenge of building a faculty comprised of those kinds of individuals, teachers who will not only help students to reach new heights, but who can help each other reach new heights as well.

Bill Law is founding president of Montgomery College, the newest college in the North Harris Montgomery Community College District in suburban Houston.

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Larry Johnson, editor

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